

Gulf executive calls for alternative to oil

By TIM RICHARD

"We cannot get into alternate fuels," an oil company executive told a suburban business audience, "until we see something there."

By "something," Gulf Vice President Ralph L. Lewis meant a cost-efficient way to use oil shale, uranium, solar energy, gasoline and hydrogen to meet America's energy demands.

Nevertheless, Lewis said it must be done: "We are running out of oil. If you do not believe it, you are a fool. . . . If we rely on our own, we will be dry in four years."

"We must use technology. We need to get to our alternate fuels — desperately. We need to use our political smarts — desperately."

CONCEDING the oil industry has done an "abominable" job telling its story to the public, Lewis has a free hand to start doing it. He works out of New Orleans and reports to top management in Pittsburgh.

The son of a coal miner, Lewis has worked 30 years in the oil industry in 10 domestic locations, Canada and 14 European countries. After convincing Gulf executives their story needed telling and that the old politics of cultivating senators like Johnson, Long and Kerr were dead, Lewis got the title of worldwide coordinator of corporate communications.

His words are short, staccato. His voice often drops, forcing his audience to strain slightly to hear. His sentences are snappy, often less than 10 words.

Monday night he spoke to 400 members of the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association. From its Troy headquarters, the group covers southeast Michigan. They met in Fairlane Manor.

"THE ARABS are telling us: 'I will run up the price of oil. With the money I will support my populace and I will squirrel some away in Switzerland. I will invest in farmland, businesses. I will send you enough fuel to protect my investment,'" Lewis said.

"We must use alternate energy sources," he said, only hours after Energy Secretary Charles Duncan said exactly the same thing before the Detroit Economic Club. But Lewis found technical and cost problems with each. Items:

• Coal — good, but "you can't make gasoline from it."

• Oil shale — "Colorado has three times the reserves the Arabs have. But it takes 1,000-degree heat to get the oil out of it. To get one million barrels of oil out of it, you have to dig the equivalent of the Panama Canal — every day." A pause, then: "Anyone want to put that on the agenda of the Sierra Club?"

• Uranium — "waste is the problem. If all the electricity America needs were generated by nuclear power, the waste per person would be the size of a button." America's political problem is what to do with the wastes. The French and Russians just bury theirs in salt domes, he said. We can't understand why we can't go into the breeder reactor. The Germans can't understand why we don't go this way."

• Solar energy — "It's not the big oil companies holding up solar. It's going to come. I want it to come — badly."

• Gasohol — "It's like a Hamburger Helper, where the helper costs more than the hamburger."

• Hydrogen — "there is three times as much energy in a glass of water (two parts hydrogen and one oxygen) as in a glass of gasoline — if you could get the hydrogen out. This is where you put in the federal dollars, the young minds at MIT and Cal Tech. This is the future. But not in our lifetime."

THERE IS HOPE, Lewis said.

The U.S., Canada and Australia between them have 95 percent of the world's uranium and are its biggest food producers.

The answer to energy problems lies in technology, Lewis said, but not it going to war for oil. "I've seen the sword," said the World War II Army Air Corps flying officer, "and I've seen the plowshare. I prefer the plowshare."

Road board hikes salary

The 48 non-union employees below department head level have had their salaries increased an average of 8.2 percent by the Oakland County Road Commission.

The raises, retroactive to July 1, provide equity with wage hikes negotiated by union employees, the road commission said. Cost of living allowances

were eliminated.

"These increases adjust salaries for inflation and reflect findings of two salary surveys completed in April of this year," said Chairman Fred D. Houghten. "This group of non-union employees has not received an increase since recent union contracts have been settled and missed a general increase of 3 percent granted in 1978."

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